

The World of the Slavs

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• 538 from German Fascism against the nation which has shown the world the path of emancipation'.

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• 545 About the same time a Proletarian poet, Damian Biedny, had produced, at the Karmerny Theatre, a comic opera entitled 'The Heroes' (*Bogatyni*), making fun of the heroes of Russian legend. Authority intervened to exclude this piece from the Theatre's repertory, on the grounds that it falsified history and represented as brutes or drunkards characters which in the popular imagination embody the heroic traits of the Russian people. And when he scoffs at the conversion of Russia to Christianity, the author sins no less against historic truth—'for', says the decree forbidding the play, 'that conversion was a definite landmark in the history of the Russian people: it contributed to the *rapprochement* between the Slavonic peoples and those of a higher culture'.

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538 It was in the same spirit that the Soviet scientific authorities celebrated, in 1938, an epic poem which, to Russians, represents something like our *Chanson de Roland*: the *Tale of Igor's Band*, an anonymous account of an episode of the twelfth century, in which the author suggests that Russia perished on account of the quarrels of the princes; in short, it would be the work to reflect the first breath of national unity, had not modern scholars (and particularly M. André Mazon) sound reasons for suspecting its authenticity.

186* So, on the eve of the Second World War, the non-Russian Slavs recovered the picture of Russia as their memories and their sentimental traditions had formed it. Certainly, the Slavonic idea had nowhere been evoked by the Governments as an element in international politics. None of the political instruments drawn up in the period between the two wars takes it into account, or makes any mention of it. But the very precaution that the Governments took to prevent its evocation is sufficient to attest its presence. This presence may be discerned in the constant intimacy of the Czecho-Yugoslav relations, in the Serbo-Bulgarian *rapprochement*, despite the 'Macedonian psychosis', in the unavowed renewal of hopes which, in spite of their borrowings (or by very reason of them) from the dictatorial régimes, the Slavonic nations placed in a Russia whose features they had just rediscovered. Weakened or absent during the constructive, post-war period, the notion of solidarity again rose to the surface of Slav consciences, in proportion as the deepening shadow of a fresh tragedy spread over Europe.